

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **TOWNSEND NURSERY SCHOOL**

Bucknall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

LEA area: Stoke-on-Trent

Unique reference number: 123957

Headteacher: Mrs Stephanie Moran

Lead inspector: Mrs Penny Parrish

Dates of inspection: 22– 24 March 2004

Inspection number: 258225

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Nursery
School category:	Maintained
Age range of pupils:	3 – 5 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	33
School address:	Eaves Lane Bucknall Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire
Postcode:	ST2 8JY
Telephone number:	01782 234564
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Ms Patricia Gater
Date of previous inspection:	4 March 2002

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Townsend Nursery is facing a change in accommodation and status as the local education authority plans for its relocation to new buildings in the next school year. It will serve as a Children's Centre, in partnership with the local Sure Start team, providing for children from nought to four years. Governors propose to rename the nursery as Kingsland Nursery School from September 2004.

At present, the nursery occupies an old building within the grounds of the proposed development site. There are 33 children on roll, aged between three and four years and all attending full-time. There is a lull in numbers at present, with the school only just over half full. The waiting list is full for September. Almost all the children are of white British ethnic background, with a small number of mixed background. None speaks English as an additional language. Over half of the children are known to qualify for free school meals (58 per cent), which is well above average. A higher than average proportion of children (27 per cent) have special educational needs, mainly relating to speech and communication difficulties. As they start school in the nursery, the children's attainments are well below average, overall, with particular difficulties with speaking and listening. A high proportion of families experience social and economic hardship.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
22380	Mrs Penny Parrish	Lead inspector	Communication, language and literacy Knowledge and understanding of the world Creative development
9327	Mr Stuart Vincent	Lay inspector	
29504	Mrs Shirley Herring	Team inspector	Personal, social and emotional development Mathematical development Physical development Special educational needs

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **OVERALL EVALUATION**

The very good leadership of the headteacher means that **Townsend is a good nursery school** that has improved very well over the past two years. Very committed staff work very well as a team to ensure a high level of care and to provide a good range of interesting activities. As a result, children really want to come to school. Teaching is good and the children achieve well despite attainments on entry that are low for most children. Very good links with parents forge a very effective partnership between home and school. Parents approve strongly of the provision the nursery makes for their children. Staffing levels are high, as the local education authority prepares to extend the nursery into a Children's Centre, and value for money is sound. Plans are in place to improve provision further through linking the new Children's Centre to the neighbouring primary school within a new building.

#### **The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:**

- Very good induction arrangements mean that the children settle very quickly into learning.
- Provision for personal, social and emotional development is very good and the children achieve very well in this area of learning.
- Generous staffing means that there are plenty of good opportunities for dialogue with children individually and in small groups; the children's speaking skills develop well.
- Interesting activities engage the children in learning very well.
- Teaching is good; the staff know the children well and teaching is generally tailored well to meet their needs.
- Arrangements for the direct teaching of literacy and numeracy do not always take full account of the differing needs of the children.
- Teaching for mathematical development is satisfactory but not embedded as well into the daily routines as the other areas of learning.

**Since the last inspection**, when the school was judged to have serious weaknesses, there has been very good improvement in the school's effectiveness within a short time. This has been largely due to the prompt action of the new headteacher, working in effective liaison with the local education authority, to build a strong and successful staff team. The ethos of the nursery has improved very well; where staff relationships and parent partnerships were formerly weak, they are now very strong. Teaching and learning have improved well, despite the lower attainments of the children as they start nursery. The school's provision is monitored very thoroughly to ensure continuous improvement.

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED**

**Achievement is good.** The school deals well with the low attainment of the children as they start nursery. Strengths are evident in personal, social and emotional development, where very good teaching leads to very good achievement; in this area of learning, the goals children are expected to reach by the end of reception are likely to be met. For physical development, too, the children are on course to meet the goals set nationally. In communication, language and literacy, despite at least good achievement, children are not likely to reach the goals set for the end of the reception year. The children's below average communication skills mean that attainment is lower than average in knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development. For mathematical development, achievement is satisfactory but attainment remains well below average overall. Children with special educational needs achieve well. Although the attainments of boys are generally below those of girls as they start nursery, achievement is good, overall, for all children and the gap narrows by the end of the year.

**The children's personal development is very good; provision for their moral and social development is very good and provision for their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.** Children behave very well. They enjoy learning, are keen to come to nursery each morning, and try hard throughout the day. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good,** overall, and very good for the children's personal, social and emotional development. Teaching staff are adept at engaging the children well in learning and the good extension of the children's speaking and listening skills is a strong element of provision. Teaching for mathematical development is satisfactory but not as strong as for other areas of learning. Although the use of assessment as a basis for planning is good overall, there is some work to be done in matching direct teaching to the specific needs of higher attaining children.

The curriculum is good. It meets the needs of young children well. There are good opportunities for enriching learning through visits into the community and regular daily provision, such as breakfast club and lunchtime arrangements. There is a very good number of support staff, and resources and accommodation are good. The children are cared for very well. The nursery is a very friendly and secure environment. Arrangements for the children to work in small 'family' groups mean that they receive good support for their individual needs. Procedures for the children's induction to the nursery work very well and parents are kept very well informed and involved from this very good start. Consequently, parents contribute very well to the work of the nursery and give good support to help their own children succeed. There are effective and beneficial links with the local community.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good.** The school is managed by a dedicated staff team with a very strong commitment to providing very well for the children. Very good leadership by the new headteacher means that the school's provision has improved rapidly. Responsibilities for other staff have increased since the last inspection and their contribution is good, benefiting the children well. The governing body is newly appointed and governors are quickly getting to grips with their responsibilities. The school is well supported by the local education authority.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents strongly agree that the nursery provides well for their children. They think, quite rightly, that teaching is good, that the nursery provides a good range of interesting and enjoyable activities for learning, and that their children like attending.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- to integrate provision for the children's mathematical development as fully as for personal and language development into the daily routine in the nursery;
- to arrange groups for teaching sometimes that are selected on the basis of the children's specific needs in literacy and numeracy.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in areas of learning**

The children's attainments on entry to the nursery are well below average and lower than at the time of the last inspection but, due to improved teaching, their achievement is now good and their progress more rapid. As the children reach the end of the reception year in primary school, however, standards are likely to be below the goals set nationally in most areas of learning, mainly because the children's speaking skills are below the required levels of development. Exceptions are the standards achieved in personal, social and emotional development and in physical development, where children are on course to reach the learning goals set for the end of reception. Their mathematical development, however, is weaker and, although achievement is sound, attainment is likely to be lower than in other areas of learning and well below the goals set for the end of reception.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- All the children achieve well, including those with specific learning difficulties. The starting point for a very high proportion of the children is well below average for three-year-olds, and this sets a significant challenge to staff in the nursery.
- The main strength of the nursery is the success achieved in children's personal, social and emotional development, where, due to very good teaching, the children achieve very well.
- In all other areas of learning, except mathematical development, the children's achievement is good.
- For mathematical development, the children's achievement is sound because this area of learning is less well embedded into the curriculum.
- Standards of achievement are higher than at the time of the last inspection.

#### **Commentary**

1. Since the last inspection, the children's achievement has improved from satisfactory to good because provision is planned much more rigorously and staff work together very well as a team to the benefit of all the children. Difficulties linked to the delayed development of speaking and listening skills mean that, despite good teaching, by the time the children leave the nursery, what most know, understand and can do is below average when compared to four-year-olds nationally. The successful development of the children's personal, social and emotional development is a strength of the nursery and, along with physical development, standards are likely to meet the goals set for the age group. Mathematical development has not improved as well as other areas since the last inspection and, as a result, children do not progress as quickly as in other areas of learning. Although achievement is satisfactory, more can be done to include mathematics more frequently within the daily routine.
2. The activities made available each day across all areas of learning are interesting and inviting, and children soon begin to make good progress just by taking part. The staff's very good skills at encouraging and engaging the children mean that the children concentrate for long periods of time. The high number of staff and the careful teaching plans ensure the development of personal and social skills is never overlooked and this a key factor in the success of the nursery. Similar priority is given to language development and this pays off well for the children's listening skills especially, which develop very well. Their speaking skills are less rapidly developed, however, despite the encouragement and good skills of the staff, and most children need coaxing within every activity and discussion to play an active speaking part. Although their achievement is good, this weakness in their use of language reduces their attainment in most other areas of learning.

3. All groups of children are helped to achieve well, overall. School data indicates that most boys start nursery with lower attainments than girls. Staff are perceptive to the children's responses to each activity planned and soon make adjustments to improve any differences noted in the attainments or interest shown by boys compared to girls. By the end of the year, the gap in the attainment between boys and girls is narrowing, providing a due reward for the staff's efforts. Lower attaining children and those with special educational needs are selected for specific tasks to help develop their language and to ensure good achievement. However, the school does not similarly select higher attaining children for specific teaching and this means that, for literacy and numeracy especially, these children are not always so well challenged. Tasks set for homework, aimed specifically at challenging the higher attaining children and generally centred on knowledge and understanding of the world, do a good job, nonetheless, in keeping these children thinking hard and observing well.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

The children have very good attitudes to learning. They are keen to come to nursery each morning, and they behave very well and apply themselves very well to activities throughout the day. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with particular strengths in moral and social development. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good, harmonious relationships enhance the children's learning, confidence and self-esteem. A calm ethos and familiar routines help the children to feel safe and secure.
- The nursery makes very good provision for the children's moral and social education and the staff have high expectations for the behaviour and personal development of the children.
- Interesting activities and good adult intervention mean that the children's concentration and behaviour are very good.
- Breakfast and lunch times are orderly and pleasant social occasions, contributing well to the personal and social development of the children.

### **Commentary**

4. The good standards noted in the last inspection have been maintained and built upon. Relationships have improved well and are now very good. Parents say they see very good development in their children's social skills as they progress through the year in nursery. The children are friendly, play together happily and share toys and equipment without fuss. During 'breakfast club' and again at lunchtime, they are polite and co-operative, helping with the distribution of food and equipment. They respond to staff and each other in an exemplary manner so that these are pleasant social occasions.
5. The very good induction programme helps children to settle very well into school. Parents say that their children are very happy in the nursery and this shows in their positive attitudes to their work and play. When the children arrive in the morning, they are eager to get into the nursery, to start an activity and to talk to the staff. They enjoy being 'helper of the day' for their group, taking the register to the office and helping staff with jobs, such as giving out cups at lunchtime. They respond to suggestions and instructions readily and learn to concentrate well, sticking at their tasks very well to achieve a worthwhile result. The children's very good behaviour means that learning time is used well and this is a significant factor in their good achievement.
6. All adults in the nursery are very good role models for the children, and their high expectations for behaviour, speaking and listening are evident at all times and in all situations. The small groups in which children work with staff mean that children receive very clear help, encouragement and guidance. All children, including those with special educational needs, respond well to the good level of individual attention, show a good attitude to their work and try their best. Rules in the nursery are simple, easily understood and promoted consistently. Rewards are given when children follow them – when they listen well, talk quietly, walk sensibly

and are kind to others. The staff's very good use of praise helps to build the children's self-confidence very well and their understanding of good learning. Children are pleased with the stickers they receive for good effort and one child enjoyed awarding her own sticker to an adult for 'reading a good story'.

- Most children attend regularly and arrive punctually, with most parents responding well to the continuous encouragement to do so from staff. A small number of children have poor records, mainly due to family difficulties or poor health.

**Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.45	School data	3.55

*The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.*

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The nursery provides a good quality of education. Teaching is good and the children learn well. The good number of staff mean that the children get plenty of adult support. The good curriculum is thoughtfully planned to meet the needs of the children well. Resources are good and the accommodation is spacious. Parents strongly support the nursery and say that it provides well for their children.

**Teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching is good, leading to good learning and achievement for the children and showing good improvement since the last inspection. Assessment of the children's learning is good and generally used well as a basis for planning, showing good improvement since the last inspection.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching is good for all areas of learning, except for personal, social and emotional development, where it is very good, and for mathematical development, where it is satisfactory.
- Teaching staff are adept at involving the children well in learning activities, using every opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills and their personal, social and emotional development.
- High staffing levels mean that there are frequent opportunities for the children to work individually or in small groups with an adult, and this enhances their achievement well.
- Although teaching is generally well matched to the children's needs, not enough opportunities are planned for children with similar needs in literacy and numeracy to be taught as a group. This limits the progress of higher attaining children in particular.

**Commentary**

- The staff have a good understanding of the needs of young children and are very skilled at encouraging them to focus on their learning for increasing lengths of time. Well-established routines mean that children understand well what is expected of them and they thrive on the very good atmosphere for learning established in the nursery. The very good relationships mean that discipline is friendly, positive and encouraging and results in very good behaviour. Staff show a good awareness of the children with special educational needs and make good provision to ensure their involvement, understanding and good progress.
- Assessment systems are thorough and constructive. The very good induction arrangements help to establish a clear picture of the children's needs. Consequently, the highest priorities

for teaching are quite rightly given to developing the children's personal, social and emotional skills and to extending their language development. Many examples are seen of staff taking pains to foster the children's interest and their growing confidence and independence, and to extend their limited vocabulary. The children's listening skills especially flourish very well because the staff present information very clearly and use a good range of puppets and toys to add interest to listening. In speaking skills, however, children remain reticent, without very patient encouragement, within almost every activity. Sometimes this leads the staff, in their enthusiasm to keep the commentary on learning going, to leave too little time for the children's contributions.

10. The teaching for mathematical development is satisfactory but not so well embedded into daily routines as for the other areas of learning. Staff miss opportunities, sometimes, to include mathematical learning within daily tasks and routines. The daily activities planned for numeracy are less well matched to the age and needs of the children. For example, children are sometimes faced with a confusingly wide a range of numbers, or staff introduce the technical vocabulary for three-dimensional shapes too early.
11. Planning for teaching and learning is good, overall. It makes careful links between the stepping-stones for learning identified nationally and the objectives set for teaching. Sometimes these objectives are too broad to guide the direct teaching well, even though the staff succeed in providing a range of activities, at different levels of learning, for the children's free choice. The observations staff make of the children's response to these activities are astute and show a good understanding of individual children. Staff are innovative in their approach to developing their teaching methods in the light of such observations. For example, the school tries to address the gap identified in attainment between boys and girls by tailoring teaching methods to suit their differing preferences for learning. Observations have prompted staff to site more activities for learning out of doors to accommodate the interests of boys, in particular. In addition, more programs of good quality have been made available for the computers and work with programmable toys has increased. Imaginative play includes roles for fantasy figures, popular with boys, as well as 'real-life' situations, more favoured by girls. By such methods, staff have succeeded in closing the attainment gap between boys and girls.
12. Much of the teaching is organised for small groups of children and, generally, this works well, giving the children frequent opportunities for practice. Some groups are made up of volunteers, with staff tracking the children's choices of activity well to ensure that they work across the whole range of the curriculum. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Most groups for focused teaching activities, however, are based on the mixed 'family' groups established at the start of the year and the varied needs of the children within these groups sometimes weakens the quality of the teaching and learning. This is a weakness particularly for some aspects of literacy and for mathematical development. Although children with special educational needs are sometimes gathered together to share an activity that is pertinent to their needs, higher attaining children are not generally selected for specific teaching and this limits further good achievement. Sometimes quite large groups of children with varied needs are gathered together to learn about letter sounds and this again reduces the effectiveness of the teaching and learning.
13. Parents are very happy with the quality of teaching in the nursery and the staff work well in partnership with parents to extend the children's learning. A library book of good quality can be chosen each week for sharing at home and 'talkabout' packs are organised soon after the children join the nursery. Higher attaining children are able to take more advanced packs home that provide good opportunities to extend their observation and reasoning skills, for example through watching what happens when an adult places a jar over a burning candle.

## Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 27 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	2	16	9	0	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

### The curriculum

The curriculum is good and has improved well since the last inspection. It is broad and balanced and meets the needs of young children well, and there are good opportunities for enriching learning. There is a very good number of support staff, and resources and accommodation are good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school rightly places very strong emphasis on children's personal, social and emotional development.
- Good planning and preparation ensure that language development is part of all activities.
- Planning for mathematical development is not sufficiently integrated into other areas of learning.
- Provision for the children with special educational needs is good.
- There is a very generous number of effective support staff, who promote the children's learning well.
- Regular evaluations of the curriculum are made to seek improvements.

### Commentary

14. The staff plan a good range of interesting activities which motivate children to take part enthusiastically so that they achieve well. The generous number of support staff enables children to receive a good level of attention. This helps them to feel secure and to take good advantage of all opportunities made available. The curriculum is well focused on extending the children's personal and social skills and developing their speaking and listening. Both these areas present barriers to further learning for most children as they start nursery. The high priority placed on promoting the children's personal, social and emotional development ensures that this aspect permeates all activities throughout the day. Adults talk to children constantly, whatever the activity, so that children develop their understanding of language quickly from a low base. Planning for mathematical development is not given the same priority and, although provision is satisfactory, the children achieve less in this than in other areas of learning.
15. The introduction of short daily sessions to develop both literacy and numeracy skills has resolved a weakness highlighted in the last inspection. These sessions work well for the promotion of language and literacy skills but provide only satisfactory opportunities for the development of mathematical skills. The mathematical activities are not always well matched to the age and needs of the children. For example, children measure their plants with centimetre rulers when matching the height with cubes would be more suitable. Within other activities, opportunities are not taken to further the children's mathematical understanding. For example, a nursery nurse working with a group of children at the woodwork bench encouraged them to share materials and to discuss and improve their models, but made no mention of the shapes of the wood or the number of nails used.
16. The school provides good opportunities to enrich the curriculum. A good range of visitors to the nursery enhances children's learning well, as when a local artist encouraged children's creativity during the Big Arts Week. A good range of visits into the locality is arranged to promote the children's knowledge and understanding of the world. The breakfast club and the

arrangements for staff to eat lunch with the children are very effective in further promoting children's social skills and language development.

17. The school makes good provision for the children's health education. Healthy eating is promoted well through the breakfast club and a healthy diet at lunchtime. Staff never allow the children to eat or to bake without first washing their hands. A sense of citizenship is developed through sessions such as Circle Time (discussion times when a group of children sit in a circle) and anti-bullying workshops. The community police officer is a regular visitor who helps children to be aware of potential danger in talking to strangers.
18. Provision for the children with special educational needs is good and consequently they achieve well. Specific difficulties are identified at a very early stage, sometimes before actually starting nursery, and the school plans for their needs swiftly and effectively. The high level of care and individual support, as well as specific provision such as the language groups, means that work is well matched to children's individual educational needs.
19. Staff work hard to provide an attractive environment, which is enhanced by a good range of resources of good quality. Effective use is made of both the indoor accommodation and the generously sized outdoor area. Outdoor activities are planned to include all areas of learning. This is proving successful in improving the motivation and achievement of boys in particular, who often choose to work outside.
20. The school is rigorous in evaluating its work and using outcomes to improve the curriculum through, for example, the introduction of the breakfast club as an effective means to providing a calming and comforting start to the day. As required by the last inspection, equal opportunities for learning are now ensured through good team work by staff at the planning stage and an effective tracking system that ensures that all children experience the full range of areas for learning. There is still some work to be done on tailoring teaching plans to meet specific needs within activities linked to literacy and numeracy so that all children have an equal chance to make progress.

### **Care, guidance and support**

The nursery is a friendly and secure place where children are cared for very well. The small 'family' groups mean that the children receive good support for their individual needs. As the children mature and are able to express their feelings and preferences, staff always try to take note of these when devising and planning activities.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The children are introduced to nursery routines very effectively.
- Very secure procedures ensure that systems for child protection, welfare, health and safety work very well.
- The very good relationships between the children and 'key workers' ensure that children's needs are provided for well.

### **Commentary**

- 21 Arrangements for helping the children to start nursery happily work very well so that they settle very quickly to routines, and soon begin to enjoy themselves and to achieve well. Many children have their first taste of nursery through the successful 'PALS' scheme – a weekly parent and toddler play session. By the time they start nursery, these children already know the classrooms and staff, and have made some friends. All children are visited at home by staff and this visit helps to cement early relationships between families and the nursery. It also ensures that the child's development and any particular family circumstances or medical needs are noted. This helps staff provide the right initial support.

- 22 During the children's early days in the nursery, the staff begin records that note each child's attainments towards the goals set for the end of the first year in primary school. This prompt start means that staff are in a good position to plan appropriate activities and check regularly on the children's progress. The organisation of the nursery into 'family' or colour groups helps staff to track the children well and to provide suitable support and guidance. The very good relationships in the nursery are a key factor in the very good care provided. The school provides good support and guidance for children with special educational needs, both in school and from outside professionals, such as speech therapists, where necessary.
- 23 Procedures for child protection and welfare are very well managed by the headteacher, who has considerable experience of these matters. The home visit, prior to starting nursery, is of prime importance in understanding the family situation. The welfare of children is the first item on the agenda for all staff meetings. Staff are very vigilant in this respect and skilfully monitor the behaviour or emotional changes in children, as an indicator of their wellbeing. Health and safety are very well managed, with regular site inspections. The policy document is comprehensive and gives effective guidance for staff, covering all the various matters of security, dealing with emergencies, preparing for visits, first aid, and so on. The headteacher is already in discussion with the local education authority and contractors regarding safety issues for the forthcoming building work for the new school. The curriculum contributes to care for the children's welfare, as it includes teaching children about healthy eating, behaving safely and expressing their feelings and choices. Because 'family' groups are small, most parents are able to talk to their child's group leader at the end of each day, when any matters of concern regarding the children's health and welfare can be discussed. Parents say that they have great confidence in the way the nursery looks after their children.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Partnership with parents is very good and good links are made with other schools and the community. Parents respond very well to the nursery's strong commitment to partnership; they are very active in the life of the nursery and give good support to help their children to succeed. This aspect of the work of the nursery has improved very well since it was made an issue for development in the last inspection report.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The nursery has re-established a very high degree of trust and satisfaction amongst parents.
- Staff communicate with parents very well and keep them fully informed.
- The nursery works very effectively with parents, so they can support the nursery's work with their children.
- Good links with the local community and other schools benefit the children well.

### **Commentary**

- 24 The last inspection criticised the nursery for the lack of involvement of parents in its work. The very positive response from parents through questionnaires and attendance at the pre-inspection parents' meeting is indicative of the great efforts made by the new headteacher and staff team and their success in re-building trusting relationships. Parents are now very enthusiastic about all aspects of the nursery's work. There is virtually nothing that they feel could be improved and, at the end of the meeting, one parent summarised, "This is now one of the best nurseries in the area. It is much better."
- 25 The very effective communication with parents begins with the pre-admission home visit. This introduces parents very effectively to staff and answers any questions about routines and organisation. The school prospectus confirms this information and describes the nursery very well. Parents' visits to the nursery are very useful to help them to see for themselves how their children will work and play. Monthly newsletters about activities and future events, and the abundance of material available about the curriculum and topics keep parents very

well informed and able to extend their children's learning. In addition to informal daily contact, parents meet staff termly to discuss their child's progress, see their records and learning targets, and share ideas on how they may be helped at home. An annual written report summarises each child's progress over the year. Parents of children with special educational needs are kept well informed. Early identification of the children's needs is given a high priority and often stems from discussion with parents during home visits before children start school. The nursery makes good efforts to find out what parents think about current issues and this keeps them fully informed on future developments. The recently constituted governing body gives parent representatives the opportunity to be directly involved in the management of the nursery.

- 26 Because they are informed and consulted very well, parents give the nursery a great deal of support. A small number of parents help in class on a regular basis and others organise the breakfast club every morning or help on visits out of school, successfully extending the learning of the children. Parents enjoy the short courses provided by the nursery, such as first aid, computer courses, a 'positive parenting' programme and many others. All of these inform parents very well on how to help their children learn. Every family now borrows books from the library to share with their children, sometimes from the pre-nursery stage. Most use the 'Talkabout Packs', which introduce stories and activities that can be shared with their children. For the children who are learning more quickly, there are more challenging discussion packs and projects. All enable parents to learn more about helping their children to learn, which has a positive impact on their children's progress.
- 27 The school has good links with its local community. The links are particularly strong with the neighbouring primary school and the local *Sure Start* project, which provides for children from birth to three. Staff frequently come together to share ideas and unite efforts for supporting the children and their families. There are regular meetings to plan the commissioning of the new buildings that they will all ultimately share. When this is complete, parents will have access, on the same site, to childcare, parenting support and education for their children from birth to 11 years. The children visit local shops, such as the florist, as part of their work on finding out about the world, and local retailers often provide donations for fund-raising events. Visits have also been made to the neighbouring chapel, as well as the local hospital and the park. The police, fire brigade and post workers come into the nursery at various times of the year to help the children to understand their work, contributing well to the children's learning.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Overall, the leadership and management of the school are good. In the two years since the last inspection, the headteacher has shown great skill in moving the school forward from serious weaknesses emanating from poor leadership. The staff team, supplemented by new appointments, has been enabled to build on its strengths to make very good improvements in the school's provision.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The inspirational leadership of the headteacher, new since the last inspection, gives a very firm steer to the school's work.
- The staff work very well as a team, committed strongly to the continuous improvement of the nursery, where every individual counts.
- Self-evaluation is rigorous and keeps the school on a strong upward trend.
- The governing body is newly constituted and provides the nursery with enthusiastic support as the governors settle into their new roles.
- The school faces an optimistic future with the promise of a new building and closer partnership with the local *Sure Start* project and the neighbouring primary school.

## Commentary

- 28 The new headteacher, at first in a temporary role representing the local education authority, has led the school forward decisively from the serious weaknesses in the leadership identified in the last inspection. The formidable task of blending a previously fragmented staff team has been accomplished swiftly and securely, and to the satisfaction of all parties. The staff are justly proud of the much improved and very thoughtful provision for the children in their care. The headteacher has enabled the development of a good awareness of where the strengths of the nursery lie, and the pride the staff take in their work as a team has established a firm foundation for continuous improvement. The school is focused strongly on providing well for the children through addressing weaknesses noted in the last inspection, and by bearing in mind constantly the specific social and linguistic needs of these children and their families that present potential barriers to learning.
- 29 Self-evaluation procedures are very effective and rigorous systems ensure the continuous improvement of the nursery's provision. All aspects of the nursery's work, including teaching and learning, are monitored on a regular basis, with useful targets set for improvement. Policy documents are very clear and wide ranging, and set easily understood expectations for procedures. Staff and governors are well aware of the intended outcome of the school's routines and common goals are very well established. The school's motto, 'Every step counts', is reflected very well in the management of the school. Since the last inspection, systems for planning, assessment and review have improved exceptionally well within a short time scale. Frequent practice and a good staffing level mean that staff are skilled at analysing strengths and areas for development within the provision made by the nursery. This is reflected in a clear and ambitious but manageable school development plan.
- 30 All staff know their responsibilities and carry them out to good effect in terms of children's achievement. Staff review their own teaching thoroughly and their records include some very perceptive observations of individual children's achievement. Although staff changes have generally promoted the nursery's provision, there has been some lack of continuity. For example, the member of staff trained to lead mathematical development left the nursery soon afterwards. The unfortunate long-term absence of the senior nursery nurse due to serious ill-health has slowed the replacement of this skill. Provision for the children with special educational needs is managed well. The co-ordinator uses her considerable expertise to give good support to colleagues. All records are well organised and regularly updated, and additional professional support is sought promptly if needed.
- 31 The local education authority provides well-structured and effective support. The recent establishment of a governing body has improved the management systems of the school well, providing an enthusiastic but suitably enquiring check on the school's work. The diligent work of headteacher and the local education authority ensures that governors have good training and a sound understanding of the school's work. The imminent delegation of the school's budget has been suitably planned and the headteacher has made sure that it is well linked to the school development plan. The headteacher and governors are fully involved in plans for the proposed new building to ensure that the new arrangements provide well for the children.
- 32 Complete figures for local education authority expenditure on the nursery were unavailable. The capitation allowed to the nursery until March 2004 was suitably allocated.

## **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

### **AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE**

#### **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in personal, social and emotional development is **very good**.

##### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Children come happily to school because of its welcoming, attractive ethos.
- Teaching is very effective; every opportunity is taken to further the children's personal development.
- Achievement is very good from low attainment for most children on entry to the nursery. Children are on course to meet the goals set for the end of the first year in primary school.
- Relationships between children, staff and parents are very good.

##### **Commentary**

- 33 This area of learning is rightly given a high profile. From the day children start in the nursery, it permeates all aspects of teaching, so that children achieve very well. A warm, bright and friendly atmosphere with interesting activities, makes children happy to come to school. The children are well aware of what is expected and respond routinely to rules, such as only talking when they are holding the frog toy when sitting in a circle for discussion. Children respond well to the adults' high expectations of behaviour so that, for example, they remain in their place at breakfast time until they are told to go and choose an activity.
- 34 Very good teaching enables children to achieve very well and to reach the expected standard from a very low baseline. This good improvement since the last inspection is due to the significant attention given to this area of learning. There is now a strong feeling of co-operation between all adults and this sets a good example to the children. The headteacher leads very well in this aspect She treats staff, parents and children with respect and so children are motivated to show respect for others in return. This is particularly evident as she greets everyone at the start of each day. Very good opportunities are provided to develop social skills during breakfast club and at lunchtime. Staff develop children's social skills very well by showing children how to use a knife and fork successfully and requiring the normal courtesies, such as *please* and *thank you*.
- 35 The recent introduction of a series of 'anti-bullying' workshops is proving to be successful in getting children to reflect on the consequences of their actions and to discuss their feelings and emotions. In a very good session, the teacher made very effective use of Tommy the puppet to focus children's attention. Children developed confidence in talking about their feelings as they discussed the possible emotions of dolls with different facial expressions. A very good spirit of co-operation was encouraged as the session ended, with children choosing an activity to share with a partner. Independence is encouraged through taking turns to be the helper of the day and through the extensive opportunities to choose. Children respond well to this and concentrate, often for long periods, to complete a task.

#### **COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

Provision in communication, language and literacy is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good. Every opportunity is taken to develop children's understanding of language.
- The children achieve well, most making good progress from a much lower than average starting point.
- Assessment is good and staff are generally very clear about children's needs. As children progress to the more advanced stages of literacy, however, records lack enough detail to guide teaching plans for the higher attaining children.

## Commentary

- 36 For most children, attainment in speaking and listening and literacy is below average but shows good improvement from their low attainment when they start nursery. Children achieve well because the quality of teaching is good. Some of the children who have particular difficulties with language development make very good progress.
- 37 From the earliest stages in the nursery, a very high priority is quite rightly given to developing the children's understanding and use of language. The teaching staff are adept at talking with children in a way that gives them confidence and extends their thinking well. Each day provides frequent examples of such dialogue. When children experimented with oily inks on water, for example, the nursery nurse talked with the children throughout, prompting learning through asking questions and using words such as *floating* and *dispersing*, asking the children to '*use just your fingertips, gently*'. The children respond almost always by listening carefully for a considerable time, using gestures such as a nod or shake of their head, before making comments that echo the adult's vocabulary.
- 38 Only the small group of higher attaining children communicate readily and sometimes ask questions. The high number of staff means that children work individually or in small groups with adults very frequently. In these contexts, even the quietest children are tempted forward, supported by the good models of speech and the receptive audience provided by the staff. Occasionally, the staff expect the children to listen for a little too long before speaking themselves and this reduces opportunities for progress. Teaching is good when staff are a little more persistent and patient in encouraging the children to voice their thoughts and feelings, extending their contributions into sentences. Children with special educational needs join a small group for regular extra language practice, but listening skills are taught more successfully than speaking skills because a little more could be expected in dialogue from the children. Parents report that the 'talkabout' packs made available for work at home provide a very popular focus for discussion. The higher attaining children are extended through more challenging opportunities to extend their thinking, such as through packs based on scientific observations.
- 39 The staff present stories and other information from books with evident enjoyment and enthusiasm. As a result, the children enjoy listening to stories and are keen to find out what is in a book. Only the higher attaining children are able to devise a simple story from pictures. Some use phrases copied from adult telling and one child could recognise the name of the main character right through the story. Most children know where to begin looking at a book, turn pages one-by-one and make single-word comments about the main feature of a picture, such as 'washing' or 'bus'. Because they find it difficult to spot the story line and the consequences of actions within pictures, their skills for gleaning meaning from books are developing slowly and they are very reliant on questions from adults to link events in stories.
- 40 Staff are anxious for children to make rapid headway with reading and have recently introduced a programme for teaching the children the relationships between sounds and letters. The enthusiasm generated by the staff encourages the children's efforts. However, more could be done to track the children's skills to enable staff to promote the next step of

development, particularly for the higher attaining children. One or two children are confident enough to decipher three letter words that include letter sounds that they know. Teaching about letter sounds and early writing sometimes takes place within very large groups, which means that much of the teaching goes over the heads of about half of the children and the highest attaining children are not always fully challenged. Nevertheless, letter formation is taught well and most children remember the mantra 'down, up and round' to form the letter *p*.

- 41 Assessment of the children's skills is good overall and rigorously carried out. The school's system links very well with national guidelines. It is most useful when skills ticked off are supplemented by dated gummed notes, telling of particular high points in the children's achievements. Early literacy skills are not recorded in sufficient detail, however, to allow small groups to be formed for more specific teaching, particularly for the higher attaining children.

## **MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in mathematical development is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A good range of bright resources helps to develop counting skills.
- There are insufficient opportunities to integrate and develop mathematics in other areas of learning.

### **Commentary**

- 42 The quality of teaching is sound, overall, and children achieve satisfactorily. For most children, standards remain well below average, as they were on entry to the nursery, and they are unlikely to attain the goals set for the end of the first year in primary school.
- 43 Some good examples were seen of staff working well with small groups of children at the start of each day, developing counting skills using brightly coloured games and checking the number of children present. The children are familiar with a range of number rhymes and enjoy acting out and counting in rhymes such as Five Speckled Frogs. Numbers are sometimes used incidentally, as when the children 'with two ponytails' or 'with one ear-ring' can go to get ready for lunch. Similar daily organisational activities help children to learn to use criteria for sets, such as 'the children wearing something blue' or 'if you are a boy, in the yellow ducks and a helper'. Games played outside, such as 'find the shape', help children to find fun in practising recognising squares, circles and triangles.
- 44 Activities are not always matched well enough to the children's needs, however, and, as in the last inspection, the learning objectives set are not always narrowed down well enough to lead teaching and learning well. Staff are less confident in their knowledge and understanding of mathematics than in other areas of learning. As a result, not enough account is taken of providing graded activities. In an activity planned to help children to recognise numbers, for example, all the numerals to 10 were used when most of the children knew only zero and one and needed to focus on numbers to four. About half the children can recognise simple flat shapes, such as a circle and a square, and staff move too quickly to naming plastic or wooden solid shapes, such as cubes and cuboids, which is confusing for most children. Learning is more successful when staff use everyday situations to extend mathematical understanding, such as pointing out the shapes of the sides on 'real life' objects, such as cereal packets and triangular chocolate boxes.
- 45 The school makes considerable efforts to link different areas of learning and to use routine activities for teaching personal and social skills or for extending the children's language skills. Mathematical development, however, is often omitted from such plans. Consequently there are missed opportunities to develop mathematical understanding within other activities, such

as counting out beakers and cutlery when setting the table for lunch or looking at the shape of wood when making models. The school recognises that mathematics is an area for improvement, in particular the development of the language of mathematics to solve problems. Some evidence was seen of staff trying to address this, for example, by using a programmable toy to guess, then count and check the number of squares needed to reach the caterpillar's fruit. Changes in staff and unavoidable absence have led to frequent changes in the leadership of the curriculum for mathematics.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD**

Provision in knowledge and understanding of the world is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching is good and all children achieve well.
- The activities provided are interesting and cover a wide range of topics, but not all are well planned into units of teaching and learning.
- Learning is supplemented well by visits into the locality and visitors to the nursery.

### **Commentary**

- 46 The quality of teaching is good. The active and practical nature of the activities provided, coupled with good provision for developing the children's vocabulary, ensure that all children, including those with special needs, achieve well. Although most start nursery with a knowledge and understanding of the world that are below average, progress is good and most children are on course to meet the learning goals set for the end of the first year in primary school. However, limited discussion and questioning skills reduce their own quest for knowledge and they rely on adults to an unusual degree to take their knowledge and understanding forward.
- 47 The staff plan relevant and interesting topics, which are thoughtfully planned to incorporate a wide range of experiences. Most aspects of this wide area of learning are covered well and make sure that the children develop a sense of change over time, a knowledge of the characteristics of different places in the locality, and a curiosity about plants and animals. Regular use of electronic toys and computer programs keeps the children up to date with modern technology. Occasionally, however, planning is done week-by-week. This misses opportunities to improve teaching and learning through devising cohesive and continuous units of learning for the children, - for example, to unfold the notion of pattern in nature through sequential activities.
- 48 Visits into the local area enhance the children's understanding well, for example, through seeing at first-hand the goslings and piglets in the local park. Children visit local shops in small groups to purchase items needed in the nursery, sometimes catching a bus to complete their shopping list. These visits are often enhanced well by the creation of imaginative role-play areas, where the children can act out their experiences. Following a visit to a florist's shop, for example, the children and staff set up their own florist's in the nursery. This experience was extended further by planting real seeds, watching them grow and by caring for plants in the school garden. Some plants were carefully removed from pots to develop the children's curiosity and to allow the children to examine the root structure. A drama lesson set in a 'magic garden' secured the children's learning as they pretended to be seeds covered in warm, damp earth, that grew tall and 'stretched to the clouds'.
- 49 Good teaching encourages the children to use their senses of touch, sight, smell, taste and hearing to extend their learning and their vocabulary. Good links made with stories mean that the children had the opportunity to taste and examine at first-hand the fruits that The Hungry Caterpillar ate. Again, good links with drama lessons help the children to appreciate the differences in the movement of caterpillars and butterflies. Weather charts kept daily draw

the children's attention to changes in climate, and windmills, streamers and bubbles outside help them to appreciate the differing strength of the breeze. Computer programs are made available each day and children are confident in their use of the 'mouse' to operate on-screen buttons.

## **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in physical development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Direct teaching of physical skills is good and children achieve well.
- Good use is made of the extensive outdoor area.

### **Commentary**

- 50 Teaching for physical development is good and so children achieve well, reaching the expected standard. The good standards have been maintained since the last inspection. There is a good range of activities for children to choose to develop their physical skills, including using paintbrushes and construction toys, and controlling the computer mouse, which they manage with increasing precision. Many instances were seen of staff demonstrating how to use tools and implements safely, such as securing the wood in the vice before sawing. Particularly impressive is the way in which these young children have learned how to use a knife and fork successfully, with the teacher reminding children to put the blade the right way up to cut the sausages at lunch. Very inviting activities encourage the children to practise their skills. The children particularly enjoy the indoor balancing bars and the castle, where they have to negotiate small equipment around a maze. The level of concentration shown contributes significantly to children's achievement.
- 51 Full advantage is taken of the large outdoor area to promote physical development. Children co-operate well to steer the large wheeled toys, negotiating the cones where necessary. They throw and catch a ball with increasing accuracy and many instances were seen of the staff demonstrating how to use particular equipment, such as the hula-hoop, more effectively.

## **CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Provision in creative development is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good. The nursery's strong commitment to personal, social and emotional development means that staff make sure that children are able to make choices and follow their own ideas.
- Good links are made with other areas of learning to help the children to generate their own ideas and to achieve well.
- Themes for role-play are varied, changed regularly and supported well by visits into the community.

### **Commentary**

- 52 Teaching is good and so the children make good progress, grow in confidence and achieve well. However, the learning goals set for the end of the first year in primary school are unlikely to be met because the below average language skills of most children mean that verbal contributions to imaginative and creative work are limited.

- 53 The children produce a range of independent creative work, samples of which are on display, adding to the children's sense of achievement. Colour, texture, shape and form are explored through a good variety of interesting art and craft work. Choices are always made available and children confidently follow their own ideas. When soaking a cord in paint, for example, to explore the pattern it made between folded paper, children needed little help in setting up their work place, choosing their own colours and, after watching the nursery nurse, deciding where to place their painted cord. They found it more difficult to discuss the resulting pattern. The patience and encouragement of the nursery nurse made sure that mistakes were easily overcome and no one lost confidence in their own decisions. The nursery's orderly storage systems help the children to access easily what they need. To broaden the children's experience, staff sometimes use the work of other artists, such as the face by Paul Klee, as a starting point for the children's own compositions. Occasional visits from local artists refresh the skills of both staff and children.
- 54 The role-play areas, indoors and outside, promote imaginative play and interaction with others well, particularly when adults extend the children's ideas and help to improve the quality of the children's dialogue. A varied range of good resources is kept in good order so that the play areas are always attractive and welcoming. Facilities observed included a florist's shop, a vet's surgery, a home corner and a travel agent's. Visits into the community and visitors to the nursery help to provide a 'real' background to the children's play. Staff know the importance of building on the children's experiences and make creative and imaginative links between different areas of learning. Stories, such as *The Hungry Caterpillar*, provide the basis for drama lessons, as does the understanding the children have gained through planting seeds and caring for plants. Each activity successfully supports others so that the children make connections in their thinking and expand their creativity through good understanding.
- 55 The children explore sound satisfactorily through experimenting with different percussion instruments. Songs are practised daily, which is a development since the last inspection. They often supplement other learning by links to activities such as counting, or to a current theme such as friendship. The rhythm and sentences within songs provide another useful means of practising pronunciation and timing when speaking.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	4
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>	<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>	<b>2</b>
Attendance	4
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

*Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).*